

# Hepatitis A and Immune Globulin

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## What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a viral infection of the liver. Hepatitis A can cause damage to the liver and create other health problems.

## How is hepatitis A spread?

The hepatitis A virus is spread through the fecal-oral route, meaning you must get something in your mouth that is contaminated with feces from an infected person.

Outbreaks may be due to water or food being contaminated with feces; eating raw or undercooked shellfish, mostly oysters, taken from waters contaminated with the virus; or eating food not cooked long enough at the correct temperature.

## How can hepatitis A be prevented?

For those people traveling to intermediate or high-risk areas of the world vaccination is recommended. The vaccine series should be started at least 1 month prior to travel to provide the best protection. Persons who get the vaccine less than 1 month before traveling can also get immune globulin which gives immediate, temporary protection.

Travelers should minimize their exposure to hepatitis A by avoiding contaminated water or food, uncooked shellfish, and fruits or vegetables which are not peeled or cooked.

Good sanitation and good hygiene are the keys to preventing hepatitis A. Specifically, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water:

- Before eating or preparing food
- After using the bathroom
- After diapering/toileting a small child.

The hepatitis A vaccine is recommended to prevent illness in healthy people age 1-40 years who have not been exposed to hepatitis A. For persons over the age of 40, children under 12 months, immunocompromised persons, persons with chronic liver disease, and people who are allergic to the hepatitis A vaccine, immune globulin is recommended if given within two weeks of exposure. The vaccine or immune globulin should be given within 2 weeks of exposure.

## What is immune globulin?

Immune globulin, also known as gamma globulin, is a sterile solution of concentrated antibodies made from pooled human plasma that protects against infection. When administered within 2 weeks of exposure, immune globulin is 80%-90% effective at preventing hepatitis A. It is prepared through a series of steps involving temperature and chemicals to eliminate the possibility of transmitting any infectious agents.

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Immune globulin is safe. No transmission of hepatitis B virus, HIV, hepatitis C virus, or other viruses has been reported from the intramuscular administration of immune globulin. Immune globulin can be administered during pregnancy and breast feeding.

Immune globulin provides short-term protection against hepatitis A – for approximately 3 to 6 months, depending on dosage.

Long-term or frequent travelers should consider the hepatitis A vaccine, which provides long-term protection against hepatitis A.

### **What are the possible side effects of immune globulin?**

Side effects from immune globulin are few – primarily pain and tenderness at the injection site. Fever is also possible. Very rarely some people can suffer from a severe allergic reaction.

### **Are there any precautions associated with immune globulin?**

The following people should consult their physician before receiving immune globulin:

- Those with isolated immunoglobulin (IgA) deficiency
- Those with severe thrombocytopenia (a decreased number of platelets in the blood) or bleeding disorders that would advise against intramuscular injections.

Vaccinations for measles, mumps, and rubella should be not given less than two weeks before or less than three months after immune globulin. Vaccination for varicella should not be given less than 3 weeks before or 5 months after immune globulin. Other live virus immunizations may be given concurrently with immune globulin or 3 months later.

### **How do I get more information on hepatitis A and immune globulin?**

Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: (269) 969-6383

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Web Site: <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/A/index.htm>

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This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor's orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.

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